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”The Harvest of Anger”

Politics of Salvation and Ethnic-cleansing in 1940s Romania: Fascist Thinkers and Authoritarian Doers*

MIHAI CHIOVEANU

”It is an anti-Semitic delirium that nothing can stop.
There are no breaks, no rhyme or reason [...] This is sheer
uncontrolled bestiality without shame or conscience,
without goal or purpose. Anything, absolutely anything, is possible”
Mihail SEBASTIAN (October 20, 1941)

”As for the Jewish question, today in any case one could say that a man
like Antonescu, for example, proceeds much more radically in this matter
than we have done until now. But I will not rest or be idle until we too have
gone all the way with the Jews”
Adolf HITLER (August 20, 1941)

During the Second World War, between 270 000 and 320 000 Jews, 12 500 Roma and Sinti, and thousands of Ukrainian and Russian civilians died at the hands of the Romanian authorities. The huge number of victims is the direct result of an intentional, state sponsored and organized policy of ethnic-cleansing implemented from 1940 up to 1944 by an authoritarian and semi-reactionary regime with certain fascist features, and backed for a short period of time by a fascist party and its paramilitary formations¹.

In Romania, unlike in Nazi Germany, the fascists played mostly the role of ”thinkers” rather than doers in the Holocaust. However, a considerable number of Romanian fascists, the infamous *legionari*, perpetrated deadly assault against the Jews long before September 1940, as well as in the period after January 1941², while the Bucharest pogrom from January 1941, with its 122 Jewish victims, comes entirely to the responsibility of the Iron Guard. This is not to exonerate and thus

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¹ Michael MANN defines it as a ”fascist fellow-traveler” that borrowed corporatist and fascist trappings. See Michael MANN, *Fascists*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, p. 293. See also, Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2007, p. 70.

² Many *legionari* were identified as perpetrators in the Holocaust after January 1941. Yet, this time, they acted as army and gendarmerie soldiers and officers, and as civilians, but no longer as members of a fascist militia and party in control of the state and its institutions.

sanitarize Romanian fascism (and fascists), as the *legionari* played a vital, essential role in the complex process that ultimately led to genocide yet, of a different kind¹.

As my paper attempts to indicate, apart from the long lasting anti-Semitic rage and hate², anger as a strong political motivation³, and ethnic-cleansing as an ideological core constituency, which altogether played a central role in shaping Antonescu's regime policies during the Holocaust, represent but the legacy of Romanian fascism, a "form of *palingenetic*, revolutionary ultra-nationalism"⁴, heading for a transcendental and cleansing nation-statism through paramilitarism⁵. Consequently, Antonescu's regime was not simply a puppet and one of "Hitler's willing executioners", as Holocaust historians sometimes portray them. In other words, Romanians followed their own path, developed and later implemented their own genocidal project, somewhat independently from Nazi Germany, whose presence and overwhelming role in Eastern Europe in the 1940 was only to favor, and in some respects facilitate, the Romanian actions⁶. Nevertheless, one should keep in mind the fact that the Romanian actions also gave a new impulse to the German policies as long as the Legionar rebellion (and the pogrom) was for Hitler a sign of growing awareness and anti-Semitism, with Europeans following the German anti-Semitic lead, the Romanian army and gendarmerie sometimes outperformed Einsatzgruppen D in 1941, and Romanian murder policies "mixed in a particularly lethal brew" with the German ones⁷.

Following this, the Romanians rabid anti-Semitism, an aspect that was over-researched⁸, will be discussed briefly, as my main focus is on anger as a political key motivation of the revolutionary Iron Guard, the Romanian fascist and paramilitary movement, and latter on of the frustrated and unrestrained dictatorship of

¹ See Armin HEINEN, *Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail. O contribuție la problema fascismului internațional*, Editura Humanitas, Romanian transl. by C. and D. Esianu, București, 1999, pp. 411-424. Much to radical and rebellious, immature and therefore unable to consolidate power, the *legionari* went within months into an open conflict with Antonescu, the army, and the regime. Banned, and with a leadership forced to fly into exile in the aftermath of their failed revolution, the *legionari* simply missed the moment to act as doers, as Romania decided to wage war on USSR, and the Romanian Jewry, only months later.

² See Robert PAXTON, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, Penguin Books, London, 2005, pp. 20, 79, 97. Paxton defines the Legion of the Archangel Michael as the most ecstatically of all fascist parties and one of the "readiest to kill Jews and bourgeois politicians".

³ I will not use anger simply as a journalistic convention and approach it as a natural response, a reaction of a human being to a situation of mortal danger, but as a relevant factor that distorts the decision making process, and it is often dramatized, ritualized and turned into routine. See Peter CALVERT, "Autocracy, Anger and the Politics of Salvation", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religion*, vol. 1, no. 1, Summer 2000, pp. 1-2.

⁴ Roger GRIFFIN, *The Nature of Fascism*, St'Martin's Press, New York, 1991, pp. 26-29.

⁵ Michael MANN, *Fascists*, cit, p. 13.

⁶ See Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution. The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*, University of Nebraska Press, Yad Vashem, Lincoln, Jerusalem, 2004, pp. 275-277. There was no need for the Germans to tell Romanians that Jews are deadly enemy as the large scale killing perpetrated by the Romanians following the German example were but the peak of a long anti-Semitic tradition. Romanians wasted no time to implement their pre-war plans, with Germans observing than trying to control and direct the Romanian cleansing, to mold the disorganized mass violence into a controlled pattern of systematic extermination.

⁷ Saul FRIELANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit, pp. 166, 169, 225.

⁸ See Leon VOLOVICI, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism. The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s*, Pergamon Press, New York, 1991; also Carol IANCU, *Evreii din România (1919-1938). De la emancipare la marginalizare*, Editura Hasefer, București, 2000.

Ion Antonescu that turned to the armed forces, police, and the gendarmerie as professional practitioners of violence, as to enforce his ideal vision of the nation and society, and implement his Politics of Salvation¹. Accordingly, I will point out that ethnic-cleansing was triggered not only by the hyper-nationalism and ardent, violent anti-Semitism but also by the determination, and possibility, especially with the advent of war against USSR, of the Romanian government to vent "righteous anger" on the weak, thus adding the "cleansing of the ground" to the (sense of) magnitude of an otherwise failed domestic policy and uncertain and much too costly military "victory" against the external enemy.

In this sense, I will not follow the entire process in which hundred of thousands of Romanian and Ukrainian Jews perished in nocturnal death marches, sealed wagons, of starvation, plagues, public executions, and mass killing operations that often turned into a carnage that exhausts the reader². Instead, I will try to find an explanation for the paroxysmal violence of the mid 1940-late 1941 period, and the enthusiasm of the perpetrators, manifested on so many levels, from the simple soldier and gendarme to the high rank officer, from the anonymous civil servant to the top bureaucrat invested with the superior and implacable authority of the State³. This kind of approach offers me an excellent methodological hint and justifies a fresh look into the "unmasterable issues" of fascism and the Holocaust in Romania, as my selection of themes and the interpretation that derives from them aims first to explore and then synthesize several aspects that were hitherto neglected, or rapidly discarded by historians.

One particular aspect that draw the special attention of many historians writing or simply touching upon the Romanian Holocaust, is the huge number of Jewish victims in the first stages of the war due the fascist and military violence of Romanian mass killings in savage massacres that do not resemble the latter bureaucratic killings⁴. The striking cruelty of the less structured in its brutality (when compared to the nazi one) Romanian process of destruction of the Jews, a process that did not included gas chambers, but in which not one community was spared, pinpoints the existence of one factor, other than anti-Semitism and ethnic-cleansing, which plays an important role in the equation of the Romanian Holocaust⁵. A second relevant

¹ The issue was briefly introduced by Vladimir Tismăneanu in the case of Romanian fascism and Sorin Alexandrescu in the case of Antonescu's regime. See Vladimir TISMĂNEANU, Dan PAVEL, "Romania's Mystical Revolutionaries: the Generation of Angst and Adventure Revisited", *East European Politics & Societies*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1994, pp. 402-438. See also Sorin ALEXANDRESCU, *Paradoxul român*, Editura Univers, București, 1998, pp 155-158.

² For an excellent and accurate account of the crimes perpetrated by the Romanians during the Holocaust see Radu IOANID, *Evreii sub regimul Antonescu*, Editura Hasefer, București, 1998.

³ In his forthcoming book on the Romanian Holocaust Armin Heinen introduces no less than five categories of violence: dictatorial, fascist, military, collective, and bureaucratic. For a brief presentation of his thesis and arguments see Armin HEINEN, "Locul pogromului de la Iași în cadrul Holocaustului Românesc", in George VOICU (ed.), *Pogromul de la Iași, 28-30 iunie 1941. Prologul Holocaustului din România*, Polirom, Iași, 2006, pp. 129-132. I will focus mainly on the handicraft killing and butchery with drilling insensitivity, and despite strain, on the fascist and military violence of June 1940-October 1941.

⁴ Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy. Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 305-306

⁵ Radu IOANID, *The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*, Bolder, New York, 1990, p. 207. See also Lucy DAWIDOWICZ, *Războiul împotriva evreilor. 1933-1945*, Romanian transl. by C. Pațac, Editura Hasefer, București, 1999, p. 348; Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol și Mareașalul Antonescu. Relațiile germano-române. 1938-1944*, Romanian transl. by S. Neagoe, Editura Humanitas, București, 1994, p. 280.

aspect that comes to the fore is the fact that, despite the early gruesome violence, and than the Romanian determination to go in line with the Nazi plans, paradoxically, by the end of the war, half of the Romanian Jews were still alive¹.

In this respect, anti-Semitism, already a tradition and a major constituency of the Romanian political culture by the time Antonescu and the Iron Guard came to power, yet only with the 1930s, and rather unsuccessfully, turned into state policy, is to offer but limited accounts when and if analyzed separately. Starting with the 1920s, first the National Christian Defense League (LANC), and than the Iron Guard, turned Romanian anti-Semitism radical and eliminationist. Both A.C. Cuza and the *legionari* portrayed the Jewish minority as criminal and dangerous, parasitic and immoral, exploiting the Romanian "proletarian" nation, disloyal to the state, therefore an enemy population that has to be watched, controlled, deprived of civil and political right and propriety, and whenever possible forced into emigration or simply thrown outside the borders of Romania. The only, otherwise essential difference between the two major anti-Semitic parties was that C.Z. Codreanu and his *legionari*, unlike the *Cuziști*, always depicted the struggle against the Jews as a *life and death* matter, as a war that has to be carried out not by legal means as at stake was the very *survival* of the nation². Constantly reiterated by the radicals, this type of ideas and messages were on the long run mimetically imported by other politicians and parties, as to turn the Jewish Question into the most important issue in Romanian society. Consequently, banning the Jews was increasingly considered to be righteous, and a mean to save the country. Yet, most of the politicians at the time remained quite moderated in their anti-Semitic endeavor, stick to the law, and stressed the idea that all proposed solutions to the Jewish Question have to be "civilized"³.

The situation changed drastically from 1938 to 1940, with the collapse of the democratic system, and values. With the gap between declarations and intentions, and than state policy bridged hastily, Romania introduced several, progressively more severe anti-Semitic legislations, constantly deteriorating the situation of the Jews⁴. The worst was yet to come with September 1940, when Carol II political miscalculations facilitated the advent in power of an authoritarian and nationalistic general, Ion Antonescu, backed by a fascist party and militia, the Iron Guard.

¹ See Robert S. WISTRICH, *Hitler and the Holocaust*, A Modern Library Chronicles Book, New York, 2003, pp. 155-157; Raul HILBERG, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders. The Jewish catastrophe, 1933-1945*, HarperCollins Publisher, New York, 1992, p. 85; Bela VAGO, "The Reactions to the Nazi Anti-Jewish Policy in East-Central Europe and in the Balkans", in François FURET (ed.), *Unanswered Questions. Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews*, Schocken Books, New York, 1989, pp. 231-232; Martin GILBERT, *Holocaust. A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1985, p. 637.

² "Programul Ligii Apărării naționale Creștine", in Jean ANCEL (ed.), *Documents Concerning the Fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust*, vol I, New York-Jerusalem, 1985-1986, doc. 10, p. 118; Corneliu Zelea CODREANU, "Discurs parlamentar" (21 decembrie 1931), in Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Documente. Comisia internațională pentru studierea Holocaustului în România*, Polirom, Iași, 2005, p. 54.

³ CAROL II, "Declarație de Presă", *Universul*, 13 ianuarie, 1938.

⁴ Christopher BROWNING, *The Origins of the Final Solution...* cit. pp. 210-212. As Browning put it "a proper anti-Semitic stance from Romania" was a way to improve the relation with Germany, deteriorated after the assassination of Codreanu. Romanian oil was not enough, nor the fact that Romania left the League of Nations. Nuremberg inspired legislation was introduced, increasing Romania's dependency on Germany and generating a wave of spiraling anti-Semitism of a new type.

Within months, this uninspired political maneuver, aiming to divert the attention of the public opinion, in a desperate attempt to secure the position of the king and his entourage, the infamous *camarilla*, while giving satisfaction to a furious and frustrated population and army, anti-Semitic and thus ready to turn the Jews responsible not only for the territorial losses at the hands of the Soviets but for all the failures of Romania since 1920, was to generate a ravaging outburst of violence that would radically change the political landscape in Romania, and seal the fate of the Romanian Jewry¹. This particular episode and the future development and dynamic of the events that altogether make the Romanian Holocaust indicate that anger represents a factor that can not be ignored as it might shed a new light, provide a new range of nuances, offer new dimension to the understanding of Romania's war regime eliminationist anti-Semitism, and thus facilitate the comprehension of the multifaceted process that led to genocide.

In October 1942, in one of his (in)famous letters to the Romanian politicians and/or leaders of the Jewish community, Ion Antonescu, in an attempt to justify and legitimize his anti-Semitic policy, recalled the anger of Romanian politicians – and founding fathers of the modern state – of 1878 and 1923, spawn with the "degrading and humiliating conditions" generated by the domestic and international pressures to grant citizenship to the Jews, "which has led to the *Judaization* of the country and has compromised the Romanian economy and the purity of our race"². This reference to the past was by no means accidental, allowed Antonescu to place himself in the line of traditional and respectful national(istic) politics, nevertheless accuse the corrupted politicians of the time for "capitulating" to the Jews and freemasons in establishing the democratic-liberal system, which granted constitutional rights to non-Romanians.

On that occasion Antonescu was not totally wrong as anger represented a key motivation in Romanian anti-Semitic politics long before the 1930s and 1940s. Romanian liberal governments, as well as other parties and politicians paraded anger episodically, in 1878 and 1923 mainly as they had the sense of being humiliated, but also on other occasions. However, none of the Romanian governments before 1940 turned to the armed forces as to turn anger into politics. Restrained by party discipline, liberal-parliamentarism and later democracy, and international treaties, Romanian politicians had to operate with basic political strategies³. In a formally liberal democracy, which Romania was before 1938, anti-Semitic anger rarely exceeded the form of a calculated dissent. Perpetuated and progressively turned into a key motivation, voiced by several emblematic figures of intellectuals and politicians that constantly blended their organic nationalism with an often rabid anti-Semitism⁴, this kind of anger became the legacy of the authoritarian, nationalistic, and radical right thinkers for the fascist doers.

Unlike Antonescu, the *legionari*, who were the first to take anti-Semitic anger that seriously as to turn it into politics, included references to Mihai Eminescu, Ioan Slavici, Nicolae Iorga, A.C. Cuza, Nicolae Paulescu and many other "prophets

¹ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report. International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania*, Polirom, Iași, 2005, pp. 50-54.

² Jean ANCEL, "Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania", in Mihail IONESCU, Liviu ROTMAN (eds.), *The Holocaust and Romania. History and Contemporary Significance*, Editura Semne, București, 2003, p. 65.

³ Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Quadrangle, Chicago, 1961, p. 670.

⁴ Michael MANN, *Fascists*, cit. p. 263.

of Romanian nationalism" but none of the traditional and respectful politicians, as the latest were the *legionari* political enemies. Moreover, such references were rendered illogical as the *legionari* constantly stressed the idea that their political ideology and program were brand new. Yet, despite their different (constructed) pedigrees, the *legionari* and Antonescu's anger, and anti-Semitism, were intrinsically and intricately linked¹.

Romanian fascism, like all other European classic fascisms, was a modern, secularized form of millennialism and overtly utopian variant of revolutionary extreme nationalism, at the heart of whose ideology, policies, tactics, and actions lies a vision of national rebirth in a post-liberal new order. Guided by a visionary elite, the Iron Guard had one major political task: to overcome the forces of decadence and disintegration and thus, turn the historical nation-state, and the core ethnic group, into a rejuvenated, harmonious community of destiny. The movement's radical vision of society, and friend and foe strategic logic, which included numerous alleged enemies (Jews, communists, liberals, and so on) that had to be purged along the way, led not only to the legitimization of violence but a sacralisation of it.

A salvific doctrine born under "wrecked circumstances", and a "divination of Romanianism", promising the resurrection of the nation, a rebirth and regenerated New Man², ready to fight and sacrifice himself "not (for) a *New* but *Another* Romania"³ that would arise with its victory, Legionarism had no other goal than to raise Romania from misery to glory, and the Romanian soul from perdition to redemption. Furthermore, it aimed to create a mystical, transcendent brotherhood of new men, able to accomplish the national commandments failed by the politicians of the old generation⁴ – cleansing Romania of Jews and other ethnic minorities included⁵. Consequently, the Legionar national and political revolution, the "Great Palingenetic Event" of the "generation of doers", was to bring social justice, dignity, purify the nation from foreign influences and Western models, and finally create a new, ethnocratic, "Romania of the Romanians", the ultimate solution to the existing crises⁶ and the only possible alternative to the atheist, positivist spirit of the French revolution of 1789 and the Romanian 1848 revolution⁷, as well as to the destructive, secular, mundane, anti-religious political religion of communism⁸.

Aiming to redeem Romania "from sin" by means of militant hyper-nationalism, Iron Guard exploited the image of a weak and corrupt state, and portrait itself

¹ By 1942, it would have been not only senseless but also impossible for Antonescu to include any reference to the ideology and politics of the *legionari*, his deadly enemies since January 1941.

² C.Z. Codreanu, the *Căpitan* of the Legion, and the great educator of his *legionari* was, like Mussolini, a Messiah evangelizing the masses and spreading the gospel of a new society and a new man, and, like Hitler, a crusader fighting the materialistic world, and Jews as agents of capitalism, liberalism, democracy, and bolshevism altogether.

³ Radu IOANID, *The Sword of the Archangel*...cit, pp. 75-76.

⁴ Vasile MARIN, "Crez de generație: ideologia faptei", *Axa*, 22 ianuarie 1933.

⁵ Michael MANN, *Fascists*, cit, pp. 265-270. From late 19 century onward the dream of a Romanian nation purged of all non-Romanians elements, Jews first, was an aspiration for many nationalists. Unlike Codreanu, prone to his doctrine of acting and tactics of planned campaigns of violence, whose anti-Semitism was encapsulated in a "death and mercy to the Jewish wasp nest" formula, most of the traditional nationalists were thinkers and not men of action.

⁶ Vasile MARIN, "Extremismul de dreapta", *Axa*, 28 octombrie 1933; see also Mihail POLIHRONIADE, "Proletariatul intelectual și revoluția națională", *Lumea Nouă*, V, nr. 2, 1936.

⁷ See Nichifor CRAINIC, "Omăgiu unui adversar: d. C. Rădulescu Motru", *Calendarul*, I, nr. 212, 7 noiembrie 1932.

⁸ Ioan Victor VOJEN, "Problema comunistă în Vechiul Regat", *Axa*, I, nr. 4, 22 decembrie 1932.

as the only moral and political force able to mobilize the nation against the internal enemies. Ultra-nationalistic, rabid anti-Semitic and anti-communist, fanatic and violent, the Legion seduced the Romanians with the promise of a "better place in the sun" for Romania, social justice and dignity for the integrated by the Legion peasants and workers, of a new state that would protect the Romanians, the People not the populace, from political manipulations and economic exploitation¹. The costs to be paid along the road were irrelevant as long as the legionar revolution was to save Romania from an imminent and everlasting disaster², and thus change the history and destiny of the nation³. Accordingly, anger represented a core constituency of the ideological matrix of the Iron Guard⁴, a revolutionary organization aiming to enforce an ideal vision of society, and implement politics of redemption that never excluded – in fact massively relied on – extensive use of physical compulsion to create a better world⁵. Obviously, Jews came among the most targeted groups, as for the *legionari* fighting the generic Jew and Judaism equated, one way or the other, the struggle against all the enemies of the legion, and Romania: moderate politicians, masons, liberalism, democracy, parliamentarism, communism, capitalism and so on⁶.

Fortunately, up to 1940, when they seized power together with Antonescu, the *legionari* were to a certain extent successfully restrained by the democratic experiment. Furthermore, being much too rebellious and aiming for a total revolution from bellow, the *legionari* were overthrown from power within months, thus missing the chance to complete the radical departure of Romania from its "traditional" structures, institutions, and norms. Unfortunately, for more than one decade, they had the time to ritualize and routinise, as thinkers but also as doers, their anger and aggressive vision that rejected any form of political accommodation, sublimation, bargaining. As the events of 1940-1944 indicate, in many respects: the idea of national rebirth and national purification by means of ethnic-cleansing, the idealized Romania of the Romanians, politics of salvation based on a friend and foe logic, negations and style and so on; the fascists were the path breakers for Antonescu's regime politics.

Unlike the *legionari*, Antonescu was not mystical and revolutionary, his vision of politics was rather limited and more pragmatic. His nationalism was more primitive, less elaborated than the legionar one, but by no means less extreme:

¹ Irina LIVEZEANU, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania. Regionalism, Nation-Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1993, pp. 336-337.

² Mircea ELIADE, "De ce cred în biruința Mișcării Legionare", *Buna Vestire*, I, nr. 241, 14 decembrie 1937.

³ IDEM, "Noua aristocrație legionară", *Vremea*, XI, nr. 522, 23 ianuarie 1938.

⁴ Legionar anger was not only natural and episodic but also simulated and constant, an elaborated ideological, political and cultural construct that often represented the very essence of the Iron Guard politics.

⁵ Florin MÜLLER, "The Antonescu Dictatorial Regime (September 6, 1940-August 23, 1944). Sociopolitical and Ideological Dimensions", in Mihail IONESCU, Liviu ROTMAN (eds.), *The Holocaust and Romania...cit*, p. 20. Contrary to the opinion of many historians, the legionar spirit, violence and anger was not altered by the 1938 purges and thereafter the advent to power of the Iron Guard.

⁶ Mihai CHIOVEANU, *Fețele fascismului. Politică, ideologie și scrisul istoric în secolul XX*, Editura Universității din București, București, 2005, p. 314. Unlike the anti-Semitism of other nationalistic and radical right parties in Romania, the legionar one was not sectional. The idea that all Jews are enemies of the Romanians was turned by the legionar leadership into a monomaniacal obsession, while for other fascists it represented an essential element that had to be subordinated to the organization mystical ultra-nationalism.

"We have to inspire Romanians with hatred against the enemies of the nation. This is how I grew up, with hatred against the Turks, the Kikes and the Hungarians. This sentiment of hatred against the enemies of the nation must be pushed to the ultimate extremes"¹.

His idea to cleanse Romanian territories of alien oppressor², strengthen the borders, and achieve national purity was rather reactive than part of a broader, proactive, modernizing vision of the nation³, Antonescu being nothing but a nationalist that could and had to harness radical populism to anti-Semitism in particular, and xenophobia at large. Nevertheless, his anger, and extensive use of violence, also "righteous", and motivated by a fierce desire to change things for the better, were, at least when it came to the initial declarations, not marked by an irrational and arbitrary pursuit of revenge, thus heading, like the legionar ones, to unwanted consequences and unsatisfactory result⁴. Still, within the context generated by the war, the ultimate expression of human anger⁵, with Romania sided by nazi Germany in its "holly war" against USSR, the regime and its politics, marked by perpetual and ubiquitous paranoia, turned increasingly punitive, and finally gave up rational and controlled anger.

An authoritarian leader, whose popularity and legitimacy was based on plebiscites, domestic order, prestige from sound victories on the front⁶, and a broad populist appeal supported by an irritable rejection of the old, corrupted, political system, Antonescu assumed autocratic powers on the ground of national emergency and against the political parties, the royal dictatorship, and even his insurgent fascist "children" when needed⁷. When it comes to fate of the Jews and the means to solve the Jewish question, the fact that Antonescu was not a "revolutionary" fascist but an authoritarian, semi-reactionary politician, makes little difference. As the war fueled the political imagery of the regime with the external and internal threat represented by Judeo-bolshevism, and Jews as agents, saboteurs, and finally an enemy population, Antonescu turned his anger into legitimate politics. Ethnic cleansing became a priority, thus giving primacy to Antonescu over civilian establishment and securing the interest of the army, the professional practitioners of violence⁸. By that time there was no need for the Antonescu's regime to think, as everything was already in place: an ideology shaped by a century of

¹ Ion Antonescu, quoted in Michael MANN, *Fascists*, cit, p. 290.

² Antonescu never gave up his plan of a purified Romania, and stated up to 1944 that if he would win the war all ethnic minorities would be purged in a "civilized way". Yet, from 1941 to 1943 he made extensive use of anger, and vent vengeance on the weak and unprotected, meaning the Jews and the Roma, who, unlike other minorities (Poles, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Germans), were subjected to ethnic cleansing by mass killing and deportation.

³ Michael MANN, *Fascists*, cit, pp. 294-295.

⁴ Ion Antonescu was looking for a long term, legal, official, and coordinated revenge. For the *legionari* instant revenge was a priority, and meant to give them the sense of holding power, being unrestricted, a first and immediate confirmation of their political victory over the enemies.

⁵ Peter CALVERT, "Autocracy, Anger and the Politics of Salvation", cit, p. 5.

⁶ Florin MÜLLER, "The Antonescu Dictatorial Regime...cit.", p. 23.

⁷ The conflict was generated not that much by ideological incompatibilities but by the fact that while for Antonescu the 6 September 1940 represented the end of a revolution, for the *legionari* it marked only its beginning.

⁸ Like most armies, the Romanian one was an autocratic institution, hierarchically organized, with a rigid internal discipline, licensed to kill as to defend the state, no matter the form of government. See Peter CALVERT, "Autocracy, Anger and the Politics of Salvation", cit, p. 6.

anti-Semitic thinking, the creation of an ethnocratic state as a political goal, no matter the costs and repercussions, a propaganda that motivated the perpetrators and demonized the victims thus turning them fit for the destruction¹.

On the first six months of 1940 Romania lost several provinces at the hands of the neighboring countries. The Romanian nation felt humiliated and betrayed, the Romanian army turned frustrated, Carol II dictatorship, as well as the political parties and politicians were altogether distrusted, made responsible, and blamed for the collapse, finally, ethnic minorities were regarded as disloyal to the state and therefore as enemy populations. In the case of Bessarabia and North Bukovina more than in other cases, the Jewish population of the two provinces was accused on the basis of a long lasting political myth for helping the Red Army, acting as Bolshevik agents, propagating communist ideas, attacking the Romanian army, and terrorizing the Romanian population². This image was as powerful as to later motivate and justify the anti-Semitic policy of the Antonescu regime, and the atrocities perpetrated by the Romanian army, gendarmerie, and sometimes civilian from 1941 onward³. However, a closer look into the events suggests that in 1940 and later on 1941 the Romanian authorities overreacted as to turn the accusations into a rationale for the mass killing and deportation of the Moldavian, Bessarabian and Bukovinian Jews⁴.

For some of the anti-Semites, the events of June 1940 were but a confirmation of their fears and, consequently, just struggle against the Jews, while others live the reader with the impression that they were suddenly and abruptly "illuminated". As Nicolae Iorga blatantly put it in his "Why so much hatred?" article, published in *Neamul românesc* of July 6, 1940, voicing his anger and nonetheless his anti-Semitism:

"Is this the reward for our benevolence and tolerance? We have accepted the Jewish seizure and domination for many decades, and Jewry is taking revenge in these hard times in which we are living. And there is no disownment, from anywhere, no vehement and public break with the acts of the murderous gangs of sanguinary sect members. Organized madness against us has swept boroughs, towns, and villages".

Following the same logic, Ion Antonescu was to reply Fildermann in October 1941, in a public letter, that the Romanian killings and the deportation of the Jews to Transnistria were in response to Jewish hate and the suffering of the Romanians from June 1940. This time, past events were recalled as to trigger present deeds, namely ethnic cleansing⁵. However, the text lives the reader with a strong sense of a simulated anger, with betrayal, grievance, and national reassertion, turned into a perfect travesty and strong justification for the horrific treatment applied to the Jews:

"You wish now to transform yourselves from accused into accusers, acting as if you have forgotten the reason which caused the situation of which

¹ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, pp. 114, 132.

² George VOICU, "The Notion of Judeo-Bolshevism in Romanian wartime Press", *Studia Hebraica*, nr. 4, 2004, pp. 59-64.

³ After 1990 this episode was used by some Romanian historians, such as Florin Constantiniu and Gheorghe Buzatu, as to explain, justify, and even excuse the Romanian atrocities and anti-Semitism of 1941-1944. See Sorin ALEXANDRESCU, *Paradoxul român*, cit., p. 156.

⁴ Michael BURLEICH, *The Third Reich, A New History*, Pan Books, London, 2001, pp. 610, 613-614.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 625-626.

you complain [...] From the cellars of Chişinău our martyrs are removed daily, terribly mutilated cadavers thus rewarded for the friendly hand which, for twenty years, they stretched out to those ungrateful beasts..."¹.

In other words, it indicates that with the attack on USSR Antonescu seized the opportunity to not that much "trample down the cringing shades of yesterday dishonor" but, behind the display of a vengeful, bellicose, and xenophobic ideology, to articulate a strong rationale for his genocidal policy. The fact that Antonescu knew months before about the nazi plan to invade USSR, as well as their intention to exterminate the Soviet Jews and political commissars in *Aktionen*, is to strength the argument. The Romanians were made aware on the future developments of the extermination plan by their partners, and had the time to plan their own war for extermination².

In June 1940, whit the retreat of the Romanian troops from Bessarabia and North Bukovina to Moldova, numerous but scattered deadly assaults on the Jews by civilians and soldiers, and one massacre – the Dorohoi pogrom, generated by panic, frustration, therapeutical violence, lack of discipline, and a recrudescence of anti-Semitism – occurred in the Old Kingdom. Out of fear of disorders, panic, and anarchy, Romanian civil and military authorities made efforts to stop the violence, isolate the aggressors, reorganize military units, and reestablish control and order as to diminish the side effect of the deep crises. Though protecting the Jewish population was no priority³, with some local authorities even issuing express orders to custom officers not to allow any Bessarabian Jew to cross the border into Romania, as they were soviet agents⁴, the attitude of the authorities triggered even more anti-Semitism, and spread anger and hate toward the Jews⁵. Moreover, most of the military reports insisted on the fact that most of the communists attacking the army and the authorities in Bessarabia were Jewish – references to Jewish groups mobilized with the attack of the Red Army as to harass the Romanian army, loot, kill, terrorize the population and the authorities, desecrate the Romanian national symbols, and so on; were often included⁶. Other reports mention the great number of Romanian Jews trying to cross the border into the Soviet territory, thus indicating their hostility toward the Romanian state⁷. Soon, most of the authorities were to accept the idea that all the attacks and acts of revenge on the Jews in Romania were totally justified by the hostile attitude of the Bessarabian Jews⁸, and later on came to the conclusion that one way or another the Jewish question – like when there were no other critical issues ranging from domestic to international policy, army equipment and discipline, and so on; to explain the crisis – has to be solved. The government started working on a new, radical version of *We the People*,

¹ Ion Antonescu, quoted in Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., pp. 226-227.

² Jean ANCEL, "Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania", cit, pp. 62-63.

³ Mihai STOENESCU, *Armata, Mareşalul şi Evreii*, RAO, Bucureşti, 1998, pp. 141-142.

⁴ AMR, fond Microfilme, reel 1078, c 0572.

⁵ Though a significant number of civilians, Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians and Romanians, dissatisfied with the corruption, abuses and bad treatment by the Romanian authorities in Bessarabia since 1918 welcomed the arrival of the soviets, it was mainly for the Jews to be held responsible and demonized. Irina LIVEZEANU, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania...*cit., pp. 112, 122-123, 149; also Mihai STOENESCU, *Armata, Mareşalul şi Evreii*, cit, pp. 66-67.

⁶ Arh. MapN, fond MStM, dosar 941, fila 558.

⁷ AMR, fond 948, dosar 941, file 217-226.

⁸ ANIC, fond PCM, dosar 482/1940, fila 18.

taking the nazi anti-Semitic legislation as both a juridical and political role model, in a pursuit of a not yet transcendental but definitely cleansing nation-statism by means of law¹. The ideal "Romania for the Romanians" was reiterated, and so was "ethnic purification", with deprivation of rights, emigration, and border exchanges of population as "civilized means" to achieve it².

This time, unlike in other occasions, the clichés: the Jew as a Communist agent, the Jewish disloyal, enemy population and so on, were the product of army and intelligence, and meant to intoxicate the state and army leadership. Media, sometimes circulating terrific, often fictional stories by soldiers and Romanian refugees, launched a virulent anti-Semitic campaign that ultimately generated a real psychosis, with the desperate efforts of the authorities to play it down by means of censorship lingering unsuccessful³. The banned at the time *legionari*, and the nazis, had a rather insignificant contribution.

The new government, headed by Ion Antonescu, installed on the 6 September 1940 by the king as a desperate measure to secure his position, did not radically departed from this type of approach toward the Jewish question, at least not in the first months. The resolution to the Jewish Question, "vital for the Romanian people", excluded, at least in theory and declarations, any violent means, had to be progressive and methodical as not to jeopardize the existing economic order, and offend the dignity and morality of the Romanians⁴. With Antonescu in favor of state authority and law as pillars of the new Romanian Order, the legitimate and just "liberation from the yoke of foreign exploiters", was not to exceed confiscation of Jewish rural proprieties, concentration of Jews in urban areas, emigration whenever possible⁵.

This type of legalist attitude and tactics render the *legionari* anger and frustrated as for them, as well as for some of the local authorities and nevertheless civilians infected with the fascist virus⁶ there was no need for a protective toward the Jews legal framework, which was but to haze and postpone the Romanianization process – confiscation of propriety – isolation, pauperization, and finally emigration of Jews from a land where there was no future for them. The *legionari* were looking for rapid results, and thus favored swift and violent, arbitrary methods⁷. Traces of the future conflict between Antonescu and the *legionari* are visible even in respect to the two conflicting approaches toward the Jewish question of the fascist and the authoritarian camps. The differences were so visible that the leaders of the Jewish community regarded Antonescu, "an authoritarian and moral man" as they put it, as a protector of the law, begging him not to follow the fascist path, and not to turn the Jewish question into a political diversion and springboard. Unfortunately, this is exactly what Antonescu did once the *legionari* were defeated. Only his approach was sectional, not all Jews being, as for the *legionari*, equally dangerous and therefore subjected to purges.

In the case of Antonescu it was chiefly for the "Bolshevik-Jew" catchy theme to make his special interest as to become a monomaniacal obsession. As official

¹ Lya BENJAMIN, *Legislația anti-evreiască*, Editura Hasefer, București, 1993, doc. 4, pp. 51-54.

² ANIC, Fond PCM, dosar 327/1940, file 31-32.

³ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Documente. Comisia internațională...cit.*, pp. 73-74, 78-79.

⁴ ANIC, fond PCM, CM, dosar 1770/1940, vol. 2, file 783-784.

⁵ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Documente. Comisia internațională...cit.*, pp. 111-112.

⁶ Jean ANCEL (ed.), *Documents...cit.*, vol. I, doc. 121, pp. 528-530.

⁷ Lya BENJAMIN, *Legislația anti-evreiască*, cit., doc. 16, pp. 74-78.

documents indicate, on several occasions, Ion Antonescu and the legionar minister of interior, general Petrovicescu discussed the situation and activity of communists in Romania, "of which 90% are kikes", and proposed solutions as to put an end to the threat: expulsion for the Hungarians, Bulgarians, Russians, and concentration camps for the Jews¹. However, not only some Jewish Bolshevik agents were targeted but the entire Jewish population in Romania, as they were working against the Romanian state, and the Bessarabian Jews, crossing the border in organized groups as to make propaganda in favor of USSR and against Romania, thus inciting the Romanians to turn against the authorities². That was, according to numerous official reports, to explain the "defiant" and pro-soviet attitude of Jews in Moldova in general, and Iași in particular, in spite of the "deep fear" of the very same population of potential armed retaliation for present and also past attitude and participation in anti-Romanian actions. Consequently, following the implacable logic of "we do not know who are guilty ones, they are all guilty", Antonescu, one of the *Grand Symplificateurs* of his time, continued to take advantage of the echo of the 1940 events, and the fabricated presence of a shrewd and cruel Jewish enemy within and outside the borders of Romania as to offer a rationale for his future policies³. Within months, the Romanian army, in many cases the same military units that left the province in the summer of 1940, entered in Bessarabia in a set up, foul state of mind, motivated by anger and revenge, this time convinced that the Jew is the mortal enemy of the Romanians.

Meanwhile, the impatient *legionari*, unhappy with the long preparations and delays, continued to attack the Jewish population, loot, destroy, and kill, coming soon to the conclusion that a massive strike against the Jewish peril and his allies and protectors, Antonescu and his oligarchic regime included, is needed⁴. In January 1941, in less than three days, more than 120 Jews were slaughtered in unimaginable ways, Synagogues burned out, and Jewish stores were devastated during a bloody pogrom⁵.

Antonescu had the power and the means to stop, if not to prevent, the pogrom but no reason. For him, the legionar assault on the Jews was an opportunity to demonize his radical and rebellious partners on one hand, and a perfect litmus test for his future actions on the other, indicating to what degree the civil population would support similar strikes, or turn into indifferent and/or intimidated and thus reduced to silence bystanders⁶. Moreover, his victory over the rebellious, which was to put an end to the reign of terror, was to shed a new light on the government, state institutions and the army, creating a positive image and generating a degree of confidence that they all desperately needed after the failure of 1940. Lastly, anger and personal feelings also played an important role. No matter how much he disliked the "legionar gangsterism", Antonescu had no reason, and could not find one, to protect the Jews, who that much harmed Romania in the past. As

¹ Marcel-Dumitru CIUCĂ, Aurelian TEODORESCU, Bogdan Florin POPOVICI (eds.), *Stenogramele consiliului de miniștri în perioada guvernării Antonescu*, vol. I, Arhivele Naționale ale României, București, 1997, pp. 366, 601, 628, 687.

² Arh. MapN, dosar 155, fila 162-172.

³ Mihai STOENESCU, *Armata, Mareșalul și Evreii*, cit., p. 95.

⁴ Michael BURLEICH, *The Third Reich...cit.*, pp. 610-611.

⁵ Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., p. 672.

⁶ Michael BURLEICH, *The Third Reich...cit.*, p. 611.

he blatantly put it: "I will not sacrifice Romanian lives (of officers and soldiers) to protect the kikes"¹.

Crushed by Antonescu and his army², the *legionari* missed the moment to implement their political vision and program. Yet, as individuals they were allowed to further display their hate toward the generic Jew, the Bolshevik-Jew, the diabolic Jewish conspiracy against civilization and culture, to instigate and indoctrinate the population and the army rank and file, and take part in the massacres, this time as soldiers and civilians, and not members of a fascist party and militia³. One way or the other, they legitimized the policy and actions of Antonescu who, on his turn, sponsored their newspapers. War propaganda relied heavily on former legionar and pro-legionar publications when it came to the "holly war against bolshevism and the Jew", the "eternal enemy" with myriad faces (agent, exploiter, disloyal, terrorist, spy, saboteur and so on and so forth)⁴.

With the *legionari* defeated and the Iron Guard banned, the situation of the Jews did not changed for the better, as many might have hoped, at least not in the long run. Except for street violence and random terror the semi-reactionary regime of Antonescu was not that different from the fascist one. Romanianization continued and it was justified as part of the process of national rebirth and purification, and anger was turned progressively into a political motivation as Antonescu's discourses and policies included more and more references to Jewish saboteurs, Jewish communists, an enemy population siding Romania's external enemies, whether USSR or Hungary. Fewer and fewer Jews were trusted by the authorities and considered loyal, and not even they were desirable on a long run⁵.

Before the war started, Jews from Moldavian villages were deported to towns and camps in South Romania⁶. The effort to remove the Jewish population away from the front line, otherwise irrational, non-realistic, lacking logic, and indicating the monomaniacal obsession with the Jewish peril⁷ was designed not so much to secure the area but to incite the population⁸ and the army reminding them that the Jews are a disloyal and suspected enemy population⁹. The final preparations for the invasion of USSR were to trigger a rampant anti-Semitism as to facilitate ethnic cleansing by means of deportation and mass killing. Official military reports from

¹ *Pe marginea prăpastiei. 21-23 ianuarie 1941*. vol. 1-2, Editura Scripta, București, 1992, pp. 126, 138, 149, 154.

² Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, p. 110. The rebellion represents a failed attempt of the Iron Guard to conquer the state and its institutions. The legionar terror generated repulsion along army, police and gendarmerie lines.

³ Radu IOANID, *The Sword of the Archangel...cit.*, pp. 74-75.

⁴ Aurel POPOVICIU, "Un popor de dușmani, trădători și spioni care n-au iubit niciodată pe români", *Curentul*, an XIV, nr. 4809, 7 iulie, 1941.

⁵ Lya BENJAMIN, *Problema evreiască*, Editura Hasefer, București, doc. 71, pp. 190-191.

⁶ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, p. 118.

⁷ As Eugen Cristescu, the chief of the Romanian intelligence, put it, it would have sufficed to watch closely and control an already terrorized and terrified population. See Mihai STOENESCU, *Armata, Mareșalul și Evreii*, cit., p. 235.

⁸ On the return of the survivors of the two death trains from Călărași back to Iași, many civilians expressed their dissatisfaction that the kikes escaped as to return.

⁹ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Documente. Comisia internațională...cit.*, pp. 186-188. The deportation was for the government a pre-emptive strike meant to remove a "hostile population" away from the front line. Any attempt from the Jews to disobey the orders was punished by shooting. The police had the task to identify all potential instigators and soviet agents among Jewish males from 16 to 60 years old, and send them to camps.

that period indicate that the myth of the Bolshevik-Jew was already at work, and anger a strong political motivation as the entire "Judeo-Bolshevik population" was to be evacuated, and all Jewish males were considered suspects, and thus subjected to summary investigations and execution by shooting¹.

When war broke out, and Einsatzgruppen D was sent to the front, in Iași, they were to "rapidly discover they arrived amid a genocide already well underway"². Though imprecise, as the German special killing squads were already in there at the beginning of the pogrom, and took part in it, Michael Burleigh's account makes its point. The initiative and coordination for the mass slaughter in Iași goes to the Romanians. The pogrom, carried out by Romanian state institutions, in a frontier city with 50% of the population Jewish, and a hotbed of radical and rabid anti-Semitism, where from June 1940 to June 1941 Jews were continuously under attack from *legionari* and Bessarabian refugees, ended up with more than 10 000 victims. Due to the existence of a great aversion toward the Jews the authorities were aware of, there was no need for Antonescu to issue any specific orders before, only later to justify the deeds in an official communicate. Communist Jews were (made) responsible for the events in Iași, with 500 Bolshevik-Jews executed for their crimes³. Propaganda did the rest, announcing that the "Bolshevik kike" was wiped out from the city of Ștefan the Holly and Great⁴. No matter what the Iași Jews might have done, or would have done in June 1941, their fate was sealed long before. But the pick of one long year of abuses, arrests, beatings, persecutions, hate speech, and so on; the pogrom was the final test before launching the ethnic cleansing operations in Bessarabia and Bukovina. The local authorities, which were encouraged to keep the order by all means, the Romanian army, no longer victimized by the state propaganda but presented in the aftermath of the pogrom as heroic, with its pride retrieved and the "shame of 1940 washed in the blood of the Jewish plague", lastly the civilians, who had to act patriotically, indicating to the police all the "suspects and strangers, under penalty of death"⁵, were tested one more time.

On a special order, issued on 4 July 1941, Ion Antonescu disapproves the methods, the violence, massacres and lootings, by civilians and soldiers, but not the ends. However, from that moment all initiatives to cleanse Romania of Jews as to fulfill the expectations of the Romanian people rested with the government⁶. Deportation, ghettoization, extermination were officially turned into state organized and sponsored policy⁷.

Rather hard for the reader to believe that in the case of the Iași pogrom the government and the local authorities were not in control, or lost it, and that made possible the unrestrained outburst of sweeping anti-Semitic violence⁸. A further look into the events suggests that the authorities reiterated and further fueled the psychosis of 1940, and later allowed the army, gendarmerie, police, and civilians to have their own struggle, and revenge, against the Jewish enemy. Yet, this time, anger was triggered by both past events and present deadlocks, as the Jewish

¹ Jean ANCEL (ed.), *Documents...cit.*, vol. II, doc. 1, p. 1.

² Michael BURLEICH, *The Third Reich...cit.*, p. 629.

³ Arh. MapN, fond 948, dosar 2410, fila 372.

⁴ *Soldatul*, nr. 2, 1 iulie 1941.

⁵ Lya BENJAMIN, *Legislația anti-evreiască*, cit., doc. 42, p. 155.

⁶ Michael BURLEICH, *The Third Reich...cit.*, pp. 620-621.

⁷ Jean ANCEL (ed.), *Documents...cit.*, vol. X, doc. 23, pp. 79-80.

⁸ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report...cit.*, p. 122.

population was held responsible for, and as to explain, the slow advance of the Romanian army into the Soviet territory – the pogrom took place on the 28-30 June 1941, one week after the troops entered Bessarabia, with poor results¹.

On the 8 July 1941, prime-Minister Mihai Antonescu delivered a speech to the cabinet, deriding soapy vaporous philosophical humanitarianism of the traditionalist when it comes to the Jewish Question, furthermore informing his ministers that from that moment on ethnic cleansing became a state matter and governmental venture, thus moving beyond riots, random terror, and pogroms:

"You must be merciless [...] I do not know when, after how many centuries, the Romanian nation will again enjoy this total freedom of action, with the possibility for ethnic purification and national revision. This is the hour when we are masters on our territory. Let it be used! I do not mind if history judges us barbarians. The Roman Empire performed a series of barbarous acts against its contemporaries, and yet it was the greatest political establishment. There are no other favorable moments in our history. If needed be, shoot with machine guns, and I say that there is no law"².

The very same ideas were exposed within days, on the 12 July 1941, also by the prime-Minister, at a meeting organized by the ministry of interior with the civil administration of Bessarabia and Bukovina, as to inform them on the necessity and meaning of a new concept, "cleansing the ground":

"This is the broadest and most favorable opportunity in our history for a total ethnic unfettering, for a national revision, and for cleansing our people of all those elements foreign of our soul..(that)..darken its future"³.

As a result, a Hell on Earth was brought with the Romanian troops entering in Bessarabia and Bukovina and acting as an Iron Broom, cleansing villages and towns by massacres, causing 25 000 deaths in less than one month⁴. As a memoir of Traian Popovici, former mayor of Cernowitz indicates, the Romanian troops seized the opportunity to release their long accumulated anger and hate, treating the Jews as an enemy population and as to achieve the political goal of the government, the physical destruction of the Jews⁵.

A huge number of Bessarabian and Bukovinian Jews died in the first days and weeks after the invasion, and most of them thereafter, to the end of 1942. In some cases the entire population of one village was killed on the spot, in other cases only the leaders of the community, often Rabies and well-doing, middle class Jews that were by no means communists. Like in Iași, in most cases, there was no need for exact orders from above, as the central authorities preferred to let the anger and thirst of revenge work as to put things in motion, than reestablishing order within days⁶. Yet, nothing was accidental but carefully orchestrated by the authorities. Plans were designed for the removal of the Jews from the liberated territories by organized teams that had to act prior to the arrival of the troops. According to the Chief of general Staff, Iosif Iacobovici:

¹ Radu IOANID, *The Sword of the Archangel*...cit., p. 204.

² Michael BURLEICH, *The Third Reich*...cit., p. 620.

³ Mihai ANTONESCU, *Pentru Basarabia și Bucovina. Îndrumări date administrației desrobitoare*, București, 1941, pp. 60-61.

⁴ Radu IOANID, *The Sword of the Archangel*...cit., p. 212.

⁵ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Documente. Comisia internațională*...cit., pp. 571-592.

⁶ Tuvia FRILING, Radu IOANID, Mihail IONESCU (eds.), *Final Report*...cit., p. 130.

"The mission of these teams is to create in villages an unfavorable atmosphere towards the Judaic elements, thereby encouraging the population to seek and remove them on its own by whatever means it finds most appropriate and suited to the circumstances. At the arrival of the Romanian troops, the feeling must already be in place and even acted upon"¹.

The strategy was simple and efficient: first offer satisfaction to the mob and vengeful army, allowing them to kill and loot, second deport the survivors to the camps in Transnistria or simply force them across the Bug². According to general Constantin Vasiliu, mass killing on the spot was favored indicating that cleansing the ground means what it says:

"Exterminate on the spot all Jews in rural areas; arrest all suspects, party activists, and people who held accountable positions under the soviet authority, and send them under escort to the (gendarmerie) legion"³

A specific and crystal clear order that at the lower level was often translated in terms of:

"Exterminate all Jews, from the babe in arms to the impotent old man, all of them endanger the Romanian nation"⁴.

No attempts were ever made by the government and the officers to put an end to the killings, on contrary, as violence against the Jewish enemy population was righteous and meant to further strength the combat spirit of an army fighting not against civilians but soviet agents and partisans⁵. As Mihai Antonescu put it:

"Our Army has been humiliated, forced to pass under the Caudine Forks of its barbaric enemies, accompanied solely by the treacherous scorn of the accomplices of Bolshevism [...] who had desecrated the altar in the land of our ancestors [...] the Yids"⁶.

Blaming the Jews not only for the events of 1940 but for all the evils of the soviet occupation, accusing them for acting as communist agents and collaborators, demonizing them when depicting the destroyed churches and the mass graves of the 200 000 Romanians killed by the Soviets⁷, the authorities kept the killing machine oiled and ready for brutal and swift, spontaneous and disorganized, dispersed and capricious massacres that are unique in the history of the Holocaust, the result of an odd mixture of destructive spirit and opportunism⁸. The Jewish population was aware, though not responsible, of all the horrors made by the Soviets and circulated by the Romanian propaganda, as they were also aware of the Romanian "revenge", thus running by thousands to USSR, only to be captured later and executed by the Romanians and the Germans, in Odessa.

¹ Arh. MapN, fond Armata IV, reel 781, file 145-146.

² Radu IOANID, *The Sword of the Archangel*...cit., pp. 214-215.

³ Constantin Vasiliu, quoted in Jean ANCEL, "Archival Sources concerning the Holocaust in Romania", cit., p. 67.

⁴ Lya BENJAMIN, *Problema evreiască*, cit., doc. 109, pp. 298-299.

⁵ Mihai STOENESCU, *Armata, Mareşalul şi Evreii*, cit., p. 290.

⁶ Mihai Antonescu, quoted in Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., p. 226.

⁷ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol*...cit., p. 280; see also Mihai STOENESCU, *Armata, Mareşalul şi Evreii*, cit., pp. 290, 302.

⁸ Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, cit., pp. 668-669.

The harbor city of Odessa in Crimea, which was never part of Romania, was conquered by the Romanian army after a long and grim siege ended with heavy losses, more than 70 000. That was to make the Romanians enter the city in a "foul frame of mind"¹, with reprisals starting before Antonescu issuing any orders². The *Conducător* (Antonescu) was only later to legitimize and justify the terrible massacre perpetrated by the army against Jewish civilians, and not only in terms of retaliation for the bomb attack on the Romanian headquarters. In a letter to Fildermann he stresses the direct or indirect guilt and responsibility of the entire Jewish population, acting as Bolshevik commissars, agents, and collaborators, pushing from behind the Russians troops in a senseless massacre against the Romanian:

"Did you give any thought last year to what was in our hearts during the evacuation of Bessarabia and what is happening to us daily and hourly when we are paying with our blood [...] with very much blood for the hatred of your co-religionists in Bessarabia, to the manner in which we were treated during our withdrawal from Bessarabia, and upon our return from the Dniester to Odessa and in the regions of the Sea of Azov? [...] During the Bolshevik occupation, those whom you now bewail, informed on good Romanians, thus surrendering them to the orgies of the Russians and bringing grief and mourning into numerous Romanian homes [...] Do not pity, if you really have a soul, those who do not deserve it, pity those who merit it"³.

This time, anger played a more important role than ethnic cleansing, with the retaliations resulting in 19 000 Jews killed in Odessa proper, and 40 000 more in Dalnic, outside the city. Most of them were Jewish refugees from Bessarabia, and thus, one way or the other, targeted for extermination⁴.

By the time Romanian army reached and conquered Odessa at the end of August, beginning of September 1941, due the impact of the events, failures, losses, dissatisfaction, and the continuous demonization of the Jewish people, Antonescu was already in the logic and line of his former partners, the *legionari*: Jew was Satan, and the war but a life and death struggle against him:

"The fight is Bitter. It is a fight of life or death. It is a fight between us and the Germans, and the Jews [...] I shall undertake a work of complete cleansing, of Jews and of all others who have snuck up on us [...] had we not started this war, to cleanse our race of these people who sap our economic, national, and physical life, we would be cursed with complete disappearance [...] Consequently, our policy in this regard is to achieve a homogeneous whole in Bessarabia, Bukovina, Moldova, and, I and you, if we live, and if not someone else, in Transylvania".

And continued:

"Do not think that when I decided to disinfest the Romanian people of all Jews, I did not realize I would be provoking an economic crises [...] damages to the nation. But if I win this war, the nation will receive its compensation. We are undergoing a crisis because we are removing the Jews [...]"

¹ Michael BURLEICH, *The Third Reich...*cit., pp. 622-623.

² *Ibidem*, p. 626.

³ Ion Antonescu, quoted in *Ibidem*, p. 625.

⁴ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Documente. Comisia internațională...*cit., p. 282.

Should we miss this historical opportunity now, we'll miss it forever [...]
And if the Jews win the war, we'll no longer exist"¹.

The war against the Jews was no longer a matter of tactics or profit but survival. Moreover, with Antonescu coming closer and closer to Hitler's vision: "At the end of this struggle we will cleanse the world of them, or become the slaves of the Jewish Beast", the fate of the Moldavian, Bukovinian and Bessarabian Jews was sealed forever. They were to be all deported into Transnistria².

For the Romanian government Transnistria was a dumping ground for ethnic undesirables, mainly Jews but also Roma³. At the same time, it was also a trap for the Romanian administration, as the first intention was to push the Jews and Roma across the Bug, and abandon them at the hands of the Germans. Unprepared as they were, the Romanians turned the deportation to the camps into a death sentence. Tens of thousands died here of typhus and starvation, in mass killings, whether preventive or simply outbursts of therapeutical violence, executed by the Romanians alone, together with German police and the Ukrainians, or at the hand of the SS and the Todt⁴. Some of the episodes were as horrible and cruel as to leave the fortuitous eye witness with the impression that he lives again scenes from the legionar rebellion, with the slaughter performed this time under the patronage of the state and army, and not of the Green Beast⁵. Few returned, from 1943 onward, mainly orphans, with Antonescu bitterly opposing the solution as unacceptable and unpopular, dangerous and catastrophic⁶.

From June 1941 to August 1944, the Romanian government, army, gendarmerie, and police, implemented an ethnic cleansing policy that took them, step by step, from mass killing to ghettoization, deportations, the nazi Final Solution, finally emigration, which by no means was motivated by humanitarianism⁷. Romania's government made no attempt to save any Jew. True, half of the Romanian Jews survived the war. Yet this is due to domestic and international protests and interventions, massive bribe, a rapidly changing military and political situation after the battle of Stalingrad. Prestige also played an important role. When the Romanian authorities realized that they lost the initiative and control over the deportation of the Jews living in Romania for the Final Solution at the hands of the Nazi bureaucrats, a situation they disliked as it portrayed them as controlled, puppets and ordinary Executioneries, the government made desperate efforts to depart from the nazi plan. Postponing the deportations, later on abandoning the plan from late 1942 to early 1943, and thereafter mocking the SS, the government made several attempts to improve Romania's image in the West⁸. They went as far as to falsify and destroy documents, and rejected the advise of the nazi officials to continue with the implementation of the Final Solution as it was already too late for Romania to persuade the Western allies on its innocence when it comes to the Holocaust. However it would be a mistake to interpret the Romanian policy on the

¹ IDEM, *Problema evreiască*, cit., doc. 109, pp. 298-299.

² Jean ANCEL (ed.), *Documents...cit.*, vol. II, doc. 31, pp. 57-58.

³ Michael BURLEICH, *The Third Reich...cit.*, p. 657.

⁴ Radu IOANID, *The Sword of the Archangel...cit.*, p. 218.

⁵ Lya BENJAMIN (ed.), *Documente. Comisia internațională...cit.*, p. 301.

⁶ ANIC, Fond PCM, dosar 166/1940, file 74-75.

⁷ Radu IOANID, *The Sword of the Archangel...cit.*, p. 226; see also Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol...cit.*, p. 283.

⁸ See Saul FRIEDLANDER, *The Years of Extermination*, cit., pp. 450-451, 483.

basis of political and military tactics and calculation, and in the absence of anti-Semitism as an ideology and ethnic cleansing as a political goal¹.

From 1941 onward, a free of Jews Romania was for Antonescu and his regime a major aspiration and a legacy for the future. Up to 1944, at least Ion Antonescu continued to justify his policy in terms of revenge and survival, expressing his regrets that he refrained from deporting all Jews from Romania due to international and domestic pressures². Antonescu portrayed himself as a Savior of the state and nation, and believed in his mission. As his initial plans, reforms, and hopes failed away, with no possibility to give satisfaction and respond to the huge expectations of the population, he rapidly turned to war as a way out from the existing crises. Once he touched the limits of his governance, and in impossibility to find further excuses – such as the monstrous legacy of the corrupted Carol II regime, and the disaster generated by the *legionari* – he turned, as others before him to the Jew, the eternal scape goat. War on USSR, and the Jews was for him like a breath of fresh air. Anger was turned into a strong political motivation, and ethnic cleansing into a policy that was to solve all past and present problems. From 1942 onward, the Romanian government abandoned anger as a political motivation as it proved to be extremely corrosive to the structure of an ordered society. It also gave up military violence in favor of bureaucratic violence. For many Romanian and Ukrainian Jews that shift came already too late.

¹ Andreas HILLGRUBER, *Hitler, Regele Carol...*cit., p. 286.

² ANIC, fond CM, dosar 166/1940, file 98-99.